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Repair

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repair

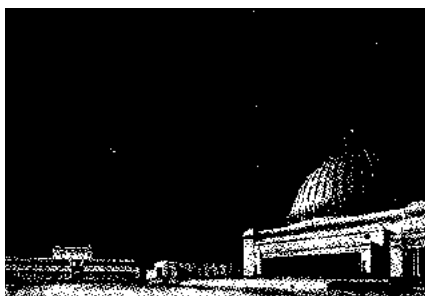
When considering our greatest achievements, surely the crafting of civilization from the nature that surrounds us tops the list. We worked with the crust of ground that was broken, the water from the creek and rivers that separated, and we repaired the material by mixing to create our palette of making. Repair, regardless of its philosophy, always existed in our culture first as an inventor, and second as a preserver. Throughout the ages, we had many key moments that the essence of repair was able to birth the peace of soul, death, and even lies. Ultimately, whatever the intent, it always comes down to the need to savor our existence.

Starting with finding peace of soul, we come to ancient East Asia during the 15th century. The Japanese Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa was given a teapot as a gift from one of the Chinese Emperors. A servant mishandled the teapot, and it was shattered. Upon learning this, the Shogun ordered the pot to be sent to China in hopes of its repair. When the pot returned, it had been repaired to an ugly state. The ugliness of the artifact forced Japanese craftsmen to look for an aesthetic solution as a means of repair. The solution was to use a method called kintsugi, which inherits the use of lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered platinum, gold or silver. This lacquer is used to solder the broken pieces back together – embracing change,

even if forceful at times. This acceptance was a direct reflection of life, as the technique's purpose is to accept the changes one undergoes in life, thus achieving peace. The Kintsugi method of repair brought an aesthetic so loved, that at a certain point, many started to break their own plates, pots, and cups just to beautify it.

Fast forwarding to the 20th century, as luck would have it, the idea of repair has moved to a new era. Ironically, this notion – one defined by beauty in time and change – became part of one of the world's most sadistic and evil regimes. During the rise of the Nazi party as a political powerhouse in Germany, Hitler dreamt of re-birthing his country into the ideal wherein only the perfect would exist. He, however, knew that such an accomplishment is idiotic if the slate into which to build is clean. He resorted to a matter that we deem inhuman. Through strategic planning and predictability, the city of Berlin would fall to ruin, effectively destroying it in order to manifest a vision into which Neo-Berlin, could be born. Much like kintsugi in its preliminary stages, forcefully destroying a city by planning, required that the Nazi party be aware of the task. Consequently, Hitler employed an Architect by the name of Albert Speer. The pair of tyrannical visionaries could effectively re-imagine Neo-Berlin in its entirety - wider streets, a new transportation system, bigger boulevards, and so on.

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It was to be the biggest wide scale city rebirth since Paris reinvented itself under Napoleon III and the brilliant mind of Georges-Eugène Haussmann, during the mid-19th century. The drive to repair required the death of many residents in order to create the beautified image of Neo-Berlin. However, due to the fall of the Nazi party, a huge portion of that plan fell into ruin and was lost in time.

Oddly enough, to the North, in Poland, there lies the city of Warsaw, a once beautiful atmospheric city with its seemingly wide streets, buildings of different heights, colors and ornaments. It was gleaming with prosperity from the people who occupy it. Upon the inevitable start of the Second World War, the Polish government deemed that the historic city of Warsaw be documented by architecture students and architects alike, as the fear of the eventual demise of their beloved city grew into reality. It is important to know, during the 18th century the Italian painter Bernardo Bellotto, famous for his realistic depictions of cities and their atmospheres, documented Warsaw under the order and commission of the ruling family of Bavaria.

After the war ended, and unlike the Imperial pot in East Asia, the city was handed to the Soviet Union as part of an agreement between the major powers of the world to achieve peace. Given the broken pieces of the city, the Soviets had to figure out a way to solder the city back to its former self, while asserting authority of a new order. A decision was to be made: either completely rebuild Warsaw in a new image or restore its historic vibrancy.

The Soviet party agreed to rebuild the city, serving as a method to allow people to celebrate rather than condemn the actions of the leading party, especially after most of the parts destroyed in Poland were reconstructed in the communist fashion of white and grey prefabricated architecture. Once the operation was under way, the guide that served the reconstruction of the city of Warsaw, was the set of paintings made by Bellotto, disregarding the vast documentation of the students and architects. Upon the completion of the city, people raced in, to celebrate the resurrection of their city.

They found that in its seemingly old familiar image, something seemed a bit odd. Not knowing the reason of this oddity, it remained a mystery for quite some time. As you now go through the city, placards of Bellotto's paintings are placed next to the buildings and on the streets to allow people to bewilder at the likenesses of their appearance. What is ironic, is that it allowed the people to marvel at paintings done by a man who redesigned cities in an image he believed is perfect, especially if he deemed the existing architecture of the city imperfect. The Soviets at the time knew about the forging of a mythical city where its architecture was re-imagined to have a different set of windows, doors, colors and floors, all in order to create the ideal image of a city that never was, building its premise on a basis of a lie.

Repair comes down to a question of ethics, what entitles repair? When is it adequate to pursue and uphold? Even though we think of the act of "repairing" as usual means of good, at times it could intend itself to the premise of being "bad". The means to that end, instead of the gold and silver dust that morphs the broken pot into a beautiful record, the tool might be the lives of many and sometimes even our beloved built environment.